

The Builder.

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HAT miscellaneous record of the progress of the sanitary movement which lately would have merited some little detail, has in a short time grown so far beyond all bounds, that it has lost all special identity in the very universality of its prevalence; so that it now naturally resolves itself into little more than the mere announcement, that not only north and west, but east and south, through all the points of the compass, every one is up and stirring, not only in one and the same cause, but in one and the same way, for the obliteration of the same train of evils, and the attainment of one and the same series of benefits. Yea, even the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the city of London, have petitioned Parliament for sanitary reform, so that it now seems hopelessly evident that the agitation, or fever, or inflammatory excitement, whatever it may be called, will not lie any longer smothering in cold fits till it carry itself and its subjects off, but that it is a good and wholesome excitement likely now to come to a head—to attain a crisis—and to expel the poison which occasioned it—to clear away the impurities of the body corporate,—and to issue into a stronger, sturdier, healthier constitution, like that which so remarkably and frequently follows on a good smart fever, such as this pre-eminently and peculiarly is.

And our hopes are all the more sanguine, seeing that we have an able and earnest physician presiding over the patient. Lord Morpeth, already so energetically and so practically active as the chief commissioner of metropolitan health, the head of a young Hercules, with a worse stable to cleanse than he of mythologic times, is redeeming manfully his promise to the provinces, by the reintroduction of his former Bill of Health into the Commons. Yet it must be confessed that his colleagues have not hitherto afforded him that effective support which, by a generous determination on their part at once to abandon the obnoxious taxes on light and air, would have enabled him to speak out still more manfully and nobly, as it is his nature and his manifest anxiety to do; and, worse than that, have, by a most unwise and unjust proposal to increase the income tax, perilled this Bill as well as their own places.

As to the present bill, it is essentially *THE* measure previously brought forward and analysed in *THE BUILDER*; and, as the *Times* remarks, "by contenting himself with the very same measure, a few minor variations excepted, he has reduced the discussion of the bill to a small compass. There are no new points to provoke the pugnacity of constitutional cavillers, the obstinacy of prejudice, or the steady opposition of vested interests. A measure for promoting the health of towns is thus placed before the Legislature with redoubled effect." It gives to the present ruling bodies the additional powers requisite for the due discharge of the new duties to be

imposed upon them. A general Board of Health (consisting of five persons, two paid, three unpaid,) will be appointed in London, to superintend the working of the whole system, and to give advice and assistance to local Boards.

In enumerating the duties which it will be imperative on the local board to carry into effect, Lord Morpeth said, when introducing the Bill,—

"These will be—to hold meetings for transactions of business; to appoint a surveyor; an inspector of nuisances; to procure a map of their district; to make public sewers; to substitute sufficient sewers in case old ones be discontinued; to require owner or occupier to provide house-drains; to cleanse and water streets; to appoint or contract with scavengers; to cleanse, cover, or fill up offensive ditches; to keep a register of slaughter-houses; to keep a register of certain lodging-houses; to provide sufficient supply of water for drainage, public and private, and for domestic use. And among the permissive powers given to the local boards will be the following:—To enlarge, lessen, alter, arch over, and improve sewers; to re-make or alter unauthorised sewers; to make house-drains upon default of owner or occupier; to require that new buildings be altered, &c., in case of building upon improper levels; to alter drains, privies, water-closets, and cesspools, built contrary to the Act; to make bye-laws with respect to the removal of filth, and the emptying of privies, &c.; to whitewash and purify houses after notice; to require that certain furnaces be made to consume their own smoke; to provide buildings to be used as slaughter-houses; to make bye-laws with respect to the licensing, &c., of slaughter-houses; to inspect slaughter-houses and places used for the sale of meat; to alter public buildings improperly built with respect to ventilation; to inspect lodging-houses; to pave streets, &c.; to provide places for public recreation; to purchase and maintain water-works."

Lord Lincoln, in his speech, reviewed the subject in one of its principal bearings, in the following summary:—"Without following the noble lord through any details, he would simply state, that the measure now brought in appeared to him to be considerably improved upon that of last year. The local machinery was more likely to meet with the approbation of the country than that in former bills. It adopted a better natural area for drainage, and if it taxed those who were benefited by it, the bill gave them an opportunity of voting for the persons who were to expend their money. The noble lord was also inclined to confine within its legitimate bounds the central authority, and there was no more intermeddling with local authorities than was necessary. If it should be found that the measure in these respects was an improved one, he had no doubt it would meet with a more favourable reception than former bills on this subject, and that it would pass the house and prove highly beneficial to the country."

Great powers being given to the local boards, great care will be necessary in the exercise of them; the inspectors to be appointed should especially be discreet men, or the Act, if it become one, will speedily be brought into disrepute.

It must not be inferred that we think the measure a complete one, but we are willing to receive it thankfully as a commencement. It has been sensibly suggested that such measures as the abolition of the windows' tax, the suppression of intra-mural burial, and even the promotion of metropolitan sanitary reforms, are too heavy goods for this one bill to carry, and would have been very likely either to have been one by one thrown overboard during its by no means calm and placid passage through

the Commons, or to have ultimately swamped the whole measure.

The 'veiled question' of intra-mural burial, although by no means left in *status quo*, is very insufficiently dealt with. The proposed central board will have power to prohibit burial in any ground which can be shown to be obnoxious to the public health, and moreover all new burying grounds must be licensed. Premises for the reception of the dead previous to burial, are also to be established, and the dead separated from the living, at least to this extent. It is further enacted, "that no corpse or coffin shall be buried in any grave, not being a vault or catacomb, unless there be at least thirty inches of soil between the upper side of the corpse or coffin and the ordinary surface of the burial-ground,"—a quantity of earth absurdly insufficient for safety, as has been demonstrated again and again. Public opinion should be strongly expressed upon this, and the distance would be altered in committee. Let the towns take an example from Gateshead, where, at a public meeting of the inhabitants, held on the 15th inst., it was unanimously resolved—

"That discomfort and demoralisation, disease, and death, arising from preventable causes—from impure air and filth, and perpetual darkness, and kindred nuisances—afflict and destroy the people of this and other towns and districts, and tall with especial severity on the poorest and weakest portion of our population. That we approve in the main, without pledging ourselves to the details, of the Bill introduced into Parliament by her Majesty's Government for the partial removal of these evils, and resolve to petition the House of Lords and Commons in its favour; but if we question not the discretion which has left the subject of burial in towns almost untouched in the present measure, and also leaves the tax on light and air, commonly called the window-tax, to be separately dealt with by the Legislature, we desire to express our opinion that *no provision for the public health can be considered complete which does not prohibit the burial of the dead in the midst of the living, and abolish a tax which dooms the people to domestic darkness and impurity.*"

The object should be to make the present Bill perfect, to the extent it goes, but not to risk the loss of it by striving to obtain more. Should nothing occur to prevent it, the first of a series of measures for metropolitan reform is to be introduced in a few days, but as to the taxes on light and air, and that no less obnoxious tax on drainage in particular, and on health and safety, as well as comfort in general, the brick tax,* pressure from without must be brought to bear on them. **AND NOW IS THE TIME**, for, be it noted that the present debate on the health bill proves that powerful support and seconding inside the Commons will be given to such a pressure from without.

The agitation against the 'light tax' increases in extent every day, public meetings are being held to protest against it all over the country. Lectures are being delivered shewing its inju-

* At the Gateshead meeting it was resolved that the petition should include "a prayer for the exemption from duty of bricks used in sewerage and drainage, just as bricks used in the drainage of lands and the building of churches are exempted from duty." We would go much further than this if the times were not "out of joint." Mr. Charles Knight, in the third volume of his "National Cyclopædia of Useful Knowledge," recently published, gives the history of the brick-duty. It was first proposed in 1736, but the Ministry could not carry it. In 1784, however, the nation being at war, Pitt succeeded in adding this to his other taxes. He was satisfied, at first, with half-a-crown per thousand. Ten years afterwards it got up to 4s. After a while it rose to 5s. 10d., which all say is equivalent to an addition of 5s. to the price. Of late years the production of the tax has immensely increased, the railways consuming large quantities. The construction of the Box tunnel alone, on the Great Western Railway, consumed a number of bricks equal to the total annual manufacture of all Scotland. There are several vintages which have taken as many as eleven millions each. It is a most impolitic tax on the industry of the country, a hindrance to improvement, and a promoter of discomfort.